

# WELCOME TO THE LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM!

## Adolescence: A Period of Transition

Adolescence is a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood. Adolescence is the period in which individuals face the tasks of establishing a satisfying self-identity and interpersonal bonds beyond the family, including partnering; learning to handle growing sexual maturity in responsible manner; and developing the capacity for economic viability, including education, skills, attitudes, habits. Adolescents' family, peers, neighborhood environment, school, and other associations can help them complete these tasks, or can pose significant barriers which many youth will not be able to overcome on their own. School, where the adolescents spend almost half of their day plays a vital role in their development. Friends and teachers are persons with whom adolescents interact on daily basis.

## Urban Adolescents in India

The age group between 10-19 years is regarded as the adolescent age group. In India, there are 207 million adolescents, which is nearly one-fifth of the total population of the country. The effects of globalization are penetrating into the lives of adolescents through changes in familial structures, that is, absence of traditional joint family systems and related transmission of knowledge and skills, disruption of kin networks, increasing nuclear and single parent families due to migration and employment. These factors are resulting in adolescents being exposed to varied lifestyles (Saraswathi, 1999; Verma & Saraswathi, 2002).

An advanced and competitive educational system, increased exposure to media, inclination towards high risk behaviors, peer pressures, and rising expectations from adolescents form another set of challenging factors. Parents too are finding it difficult to deal with the challenges of the rapidly changing global context. The urban adolescents thus find themselves caught in the web of continually mounting contextual changes and are struggling to meet the complex demands and pressures. Adolescents are exposed to a vast variety of choices. Such a scenario may sometimes lead to stress and engagement in high risk behaviors or even suicide (WHO, 1997; Gardiner, Mutter, & Kosmitzki, 1998). Every time parents or any other guiding adult may not be present to help them to face and cope with troublesome situations. Thus, they need to develop the necessary life skills to confront challenges and make appropriate decisions. Studies also indicate that there is a need for empowerment of adolescents for day to day living to develop mature and responsible behavior which would hold them in good stead (UNESCO, 2001).

Life skills, thus, become quintessential in the present urban context. Development of life skills such as thinking skills, social skills and negotiation skills among adolescents should be the aim of interventions and programs (Chakrabarti, 2007) Furthermore, adolescents are budding at this stage of life, and a little input in terms of life skills education can help them balance their interesting transition into adulthood. Healthy adolescents have a better chance of becoming productive adults, leading to greater skills, fewer work days lost to illness, longer working lives and increased productivity and progress (WHO, 1999; UNICEF, 2002).

The **ABCS** of adolescent health and development policy according to WHO (2006) are:

- A**ccesses information,
- B**asic life skills
- C**omprehensive health services and
- S**afe and supportive environment

Imparting *Life Skills Education* is one way of developing positive attitude towards life for a healthy living in this significant adolescent population.

## Life Skills Education : Concept and Definitions

Life skills education is an interactive, educational methodology focusing on transmitting knowledge and helps in shaping attitudes and developing interpersonal skills. The main goal of life skills education is to enhance young people's ability to take responsibility for making healthier choices, resisting negative pressures, and avoiding risk behaviors (Moya, 2002). The life skills approach involves a comprehensive behavior change perspective that concentrates on the development of the skills needed for life such as communicating effectively, maintaining relationships, decision-making and thinking, managing emotion, assertiveness, building self-esteem, and resisting peer pressure. Additionally, it addresses the important related issues of empowering girls and guiding boys towards new values.

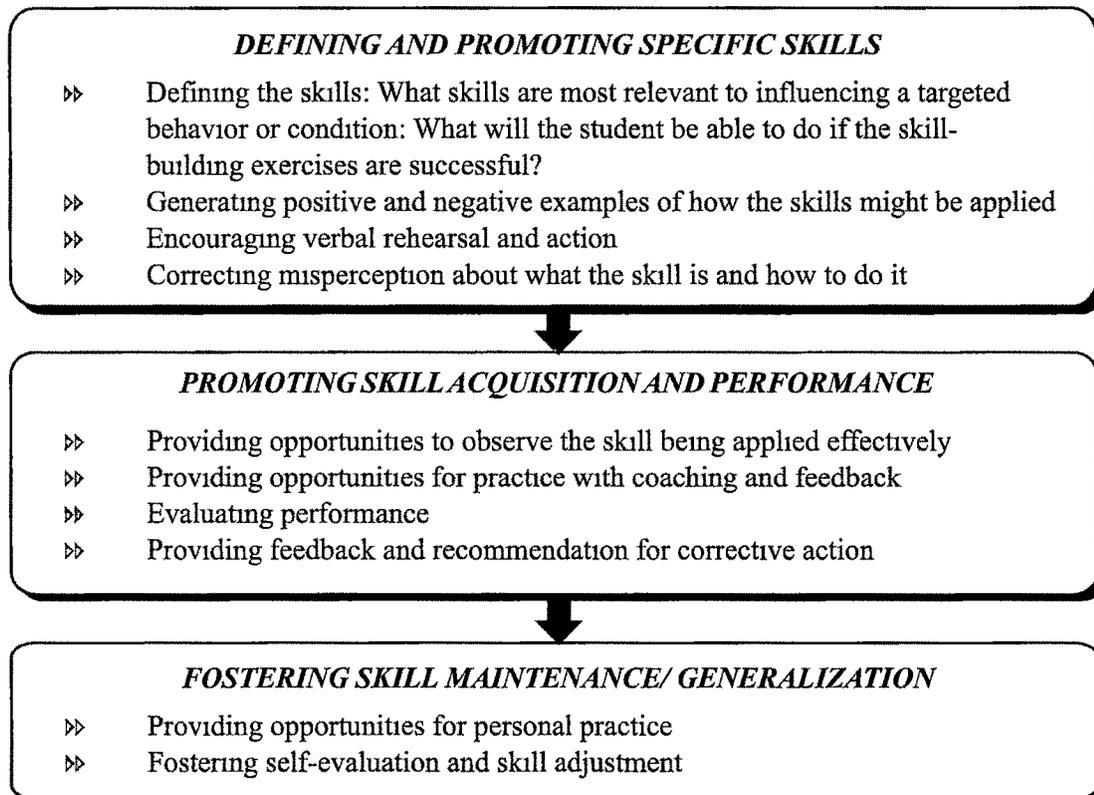
Participatory teaching methods along with a variety of other innovative teaching techniques are used for life skills approach, which are youth-centered, gender-sensitive, and interactive. The most common teaching methods include group activities, brainstorming, role-playing, story telling, games, puzzles, debating, discussions and audiovisual activities.

The core life skills include the ability to:

- » Make decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively
- » Clarify and analyze values
- » Communicate, including listening, building empathy, be asserting and negotiating
- » Cope with emotions and stress
- » Feel empathy with others and be self-aware. (UNFPA, 2002)

### *Cycle of Life Skills*

According to WHO/UNICEF (2006), the cycle of life skills follows a stepwise trajectory presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. Cycle of Life Skills Development** (Source: Mangrulkar L., Whitman C V, & Posner M, 2001)

## ***Usefulness of Life Skills***

According to UNESCO and Indian National Commission for co-operation with UNESCO (2001), life skills practically are skills which intend to equip the learner with better competencies and abilities aiming at bringing positive behavioral changes. The usefulness of life skills is as follows.

- » Life skills are abilities that further motivate individuals to behave in healthy ways, provided they want to do so and are given the scope and opportunity to do so.
- » Life skills form a link between self-care and self-discipline on the one hand, and self-confidence on the other.
- » Life skills alone are not enough. They must be complemented by support from the community and cultural environmental factors, which move individuals to positive action.
- » Life skills not only improve self-image but also contribute to better interpersonal relationships, through a sense of physical and mental well-being.
- » Life skills promote physical, mental, and social sense of positive attitudes and hence prevent mental disorders and behavioral problems, in addition to preventing health problems.
- » Life skills make for better ties in the family and peer group.
- » With increased self-awareness and better self-management the chance of impulsive action is reduced.
- » Life skills teaching provide rehearsals of situations, which bring negative pressures, like indulgence in drugs and sex. The resultant competency to withstand pressures can be used to resist peer pressure or social compulsions.
- » Life skills of critical thinking and problem-solving help out-of-school children to resist and avoid abuse.
- » Life skills make it possible for them to think of future goals and service to others and protecting the environment.

## **ABOUT THE MANUAL**

This manual is designed to develop life skills in urban school going adolescents from standard VIII. The manual is developed based on a life skills intervention program conducted in Udaipur, Rajasthan, India. Four experts from the fields of Human Development and Family Studies, Education and Psychology, and Social Work have contributed at every stage of the research as well as the development of the life skills program.

This manual explains the life skills program in detail along with the specific procedures and order to implement. The life skills program is divided in six modules. The modules include sessions specifically focusing on basic life skills such as self, decision making, communication and management. You may find overlaps among the sessions as these categories are inter-linked. This is due to the difficulty in separating the domains of life skills, namely, self-oriented skills, thinking skills, social skills, communication skills, management skills and adolescent awareness and health, which are deeply interwoven. The manual is divided into the following six modules:

**MODULE 1** covers the domains *self*, titled as “MYSELF”. It has three in-built sessions namely self awareness, self study and my attitude towards gender.

**Session 1** 'Self Awareness' is an activity to evaluate how aware one is about one's strengths weaknesses, good and bad qualities

**Session 2** 'Self Study' provides effective for excelling in academics by increasing concentration and developing right methods of studying

**Session 3** 'My attitude towards Gender' is an activity for gender sensitization among adolescents

**MODULE 2** comprises the domain of *thinking skills* essentially in terms of decision making, titled as “MY DECISIONS”.

**Session 1** 'Decision making and problem solving' traces the method of making a decision after weighing alternatives

**Session 2** 'Choosing a Career!' especially guides an adolescent for decision making related to career

- MODULE 3** encompasses the domain of *self and thinking skills* mainly for personal health and hygiene, titled as “**MY HEALTH**”.
- Session 1** 'Basic health and nutrition' deals with topics of balanced diet, exercise and healthy food habits
- Session 2** 'Personal hygiene' delves into personal and genital cleanliness and sanitation habits
- MODULE 4** consists of *self, thinking and social skills* related to emotions, titled as “**MY EMOTIONS**”.
- Session 1** 'Dealing with Anger, Depression and Stress' helps adolescents manage their most faced emotions
- Session 2** 'Friendship and love' throws light on concepts and limitations of friendship and love
- MODULE 5** involves *self, thinking and social skills* titled as “**MY RELATIONSHIPS**”.
- Session 1** 'Self and Relationships' and
- Session 2** 'My parents and I' show effective ways of managing relationships with parents, friends, teachers and others
- MODULE 6** includes *self, thinking and management skills* titled as “**MY COMMUNICATION**”.
- Session 1** 'Types of communication: Listening and speaking carefully' and
- Session 2** 'Being assertive not aggressive' trains adolescents for effective communication skills whereas
- Session 3** 'Television, Advertisements and I' deals with the negative effect of media on adolescents

The manual would be useful for adolescents, their parents, teachers, community organizations, adolescent training program organizers, and stakeholders for inculcating life skills among adolescents. The sessions outlined here are based on the action research program implemented in a specific setting. However, it may be adapted locally according to culture, class, caste, region, religion, age and gender to make it contextually appropriate. Appendices provide alternate activities games and tips for keeping sessions alive and full of fun.

#### Tips For Implementing Life Skills Programs (WHO & UNICEF, 2006)

- ▶▶ This manual is only a template. Adapt the individual sessions and/or the entire approach to your local situation and language.
- ▶▶ Before starting, perform an assessment of the group to help tailor the program to specific local needs.
- ▶▶ If your work is going to be with students, meet with the headmasters and teachers first so that they will understand the program, possibly help in the implementation, and reinforce the content in class.
- ▶▶ Do not limit your life skills approach to youth or to HIV/AIDS only. Life skills can be implemented in many different populations! Adapt, adapt, adapt!
- ▶▶ You do not need money or resources to implement this program at the local level. If you are working within a school, you might make life skills activities part of an after school club.

#### Tips For Facilitators (WHO & UNICEF, 2006)

- ▶▶ As most life skills sessions involve games or role plays, it may be most effective to have participants sit in a circle, with deal of open space in the center of the circle. This will allow for unhindered movement within the group for the exercises.
- ▶▶ “Own” the training space. Be sure to move around a great deal within the circle-approaching various participants, acting things out, and using different tones of voice. Such confidence from the facilitators makes it easier for participants to feel comfortable as they perform role plays or play games.

- » Be conscious of the gender division of your facilitators. Having an equal number of men and women facilitating the program can be much more powerful than merely talking about gender equality. It also helps by introducing a variety of perspectives on the topics and by demonstrating the crucial life skill of interacting well with the opposite sex.
- » Be respectful when working with co-facilitators. Avoid correcting or interrupting your partner when he or she is facilitating, and be conscious of your body language and facial expressions while other trainers are facilitating. You are always on stage. Also, when one facilitator is guiding the group, other trainers should sit down- too many trainers at the front of the room can be distracting.
- » For sensitive topics, it may be best to separate into single-sex groups to encourage better participation from both girls and boys. It is important, however, for them to come back together and present their ideas to each other. This sharing of information between sexes and attempting to work together comfortably is essential to the program.
- » Keep your participants involved by eliciting answers from them rather than lecturing to the group.
- » Summarize the points on a flip chart or blackboard, if possible.
- » Pay attention to the scheduling of your sessions. Sessions near the end of the day or after meals should be lively to keep people awake. One session should move logically into another session.
- » Start morning and afternoon sessions with warmups or energizers.
- » Monitor how your group is feeling. Have an alternative way to teach the same subjects, and change styles as needed.
- » Collect resources on the day's subject and create a resource table at the back of the room for participants to peruse during breaks. Invite participants to make a list of ways in which they can serve as a resource for each other.

## **Evaluating Life Skills Program**

Evaluation is important to consider from the outset and throughout your program. When you assess needs at the very beginning (conduct a situation analysis), set objectives, and devise an action plan and activities, you are laying the groundwork for evaluation. At the same time, you need a formal evaluation plan to track progress and you need to be certain that your evaluation design is feasible to implement.

Comprehensive evaluation designs include both process evaluation and outcome evaluation. The different techniques of evaluation used are as follows (UNICEF/CARICOM, 2001 in WHO & UNICEF, 2006):

### **1. Paper-And-Pencil Assessments**

Knowledge, attitude, and skill level can be self-assessed by peer or students or assessed by teachers, other facilitators, parents, and community members. Paper and pencil assessment includes worksheets, tests, quizzes, and homework assignments. They may include forced-choice items like the following - multiple choice, matching, multiple responses, fill-in the-blank, and rating scales

### **2. Observations-**

Teachers directly observe their students every day in a variety of settings, under all types of conditions. Observation permits immediate, on-the-spot assessment of behavior, such as cooperation. Daily observation (e.g., a teacher log) over an extended period permits more direct and more reliable references about patterns of behavior.

### **3. Alternative Assessment Methods-**

Pen and paper methods are not always useful for assessing the affective domain, such as feelings, attitudes, and values or skills like assertiveness, refusal skills, decision making, and problem-solving. Creative ways of assessing skills include a range of collaborative methods, such as peer feedback on a performance, group assessment of demonstration or a role play against a set of predetermined criteria, or community-based projects or internships. A multi-faceted assessment may include Exhibitions, Reports, Oral Presentations, Projects, Portfolios, Interviews, Concept mapping, Systematic observation or Long-term investigation.